



encounter

**encounter
goes green!**



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next edition of ncounter

The next edition of ncounter is entitled 'Isms and Schisms in the Church'. With the existence of so many thoughts and attitudes in our society, how can we know which is worthy of following?

We have individualism, Hinduism, Confucianism, post-modernism and secularism.

If you have some thoughts to contribute for or against, let us know about it at encounter@adventist.org.uk. We really do enjoy hearing from you!

Letters from a Troubled Soul – Unfortunately, due to illness, Samantha Ecclestone (was Wiggins) is unable to write for this edition. Hopefully she will be feeling back in form for the Christmas edition.

contacts

Members of the Youth team throughout the BUC territory

The BUC, Des Boldeau, dboldeau@adventist.org.uk

Natalie Davison, ndavison@adventist.org.uk

The Irish Mission, Adam Keough, adam@adventist.ie

The Scottish Mission, Marcel Ghioalda,

marcel@sdascotland.com

The Welsh Mission, Jeremy Tremeer,

jtremeer@adventistwales.org

The SEC, Colin Stewart, cstewart@secadventist.org.uk

Nathan Stickland, nstickland@secadventist.org.uk

Eddie Hypolite, ehypolite@secadventist.org.uk

The NEC, Alan Hush, ahush@necadventist.org.uk

Trevor Thomas, tthomas@necadventist.org.uk

Editorial

Summer was strange this year. First it was hot. Then it rained and rained and rained. And then it was hot again. I'm told this is because of climate change, caused by CO₂ gas emissions and too much pollution in the atmosphere. In this edition of ncounter, we look at the issue of conservation as Christians. We are pleased to have input from Dr Mart de Groot, a leading scientist and pastor in the Irish Mission, who asks us to look again at something we take for granted. Anna Surridge, Climate Change Champion for Wales, also gives a glimpse into her busy year, as do the Plaistow Pathfinders.

Summer is always a busy period, and this year there was plenty of activity in the NEC during the ASI Youth for Jesus campaign – a full report is on page 6. In August, around 130 young people spent five days in Germany at the Pan-European Youth Congress. Read all about it on page 19.

Many of you will be starting university and others will be returning – please make sure that you let us know where you are so that we can send you information about programmes that we are running. Email us at encounter@adventist.org.uk

God bless you.

• Des



Green terrorists

• Des G. Boldeau

Does rubbish exist anymore? I'm beginning to wonder. I used to have one bin in the kitchen and put all the 'rubbish' in it. Paper, plastics, food (cooked and uncooked), tin cans and cardboard all went into the same bin. Now I have one bin in the kitchen, for general stuff, a plastic box for plastics and cans, one for paper, another for glass, a large black bin for general trash and a compost bin for cardboard, grass cuttings and uncooked food.

When I go shopping in the supermarket, I can buy groceries after filling the clothes and shoe bins with things I no longer want. Recycling is all the rage. Sometimes annoyingly so! There's even recycled toilet paper. I wasn't really excited about recycling until I realised that my apathy in carrying out this civic duty was contributing to the death of the planet.

As a Pathfinder, I am an avid camper and lover of the outdoors. For me, there is nothing better than spending quality time breathing in fresh air and admiring God's wonderful Creation. Walking through the woods on an early autumnal evening, all wrapped up and cosy, is heaven to me. And even pitching a tent in the rain holds a certain appeal. When I am outdoors, I feel closer to God. And I have no patience with those who have no respect for nature or those who think nothing of littering open green spaces with bottles and cans. The terrorists who think that the whole world is one great big dustbin make my blood boil.

But thinking about it seriously, am I any better? Do I really care for the wonderful world that God has given to us all?



When God made the world, he looked at it and saw that 'it was good'. When sin entered the world, the goodness was tainted. Thorns and thistles sprang up everywhere, and although much beauty remained, that blanket of

perfection was lifted. One of the indications of sin in the world was the need for man to be clothed. The innocent nakedness that they had previously experienced was gone, and God provided them with clothing by killing animals.

And since then we have exploited living creatures and the earth for our benefit, especially food and clothing. As part of this exploitation we have created man-made substances by pilfering resources of the earth that we have now discovered are in short supply. We are now in panic mode, because of our greed. When God killed the animals for clothing, it was a necessity; when we plunder the riches of the earth, it is often for profit.

So why recycle? When we recycle, used products are turned into new products, reducing the need to consume natural resources. Recycling also saves energy. It requires more energy to create products from raw materials than it does using recycled materials in the manufacturing process. As recycling saves energy, it also reduces greenhouse gas emissions. This helps to tackle climate change. Current UK recycling is estimated to save more than 18 million tonnes of CO₂ a year – the equivalent of taking 5 million cars off the road each year. When we recycle we reduce the amount of rubbish that is sent to landfill sites.

(www.recyclenow.com/why_recycling_matters/why_it_matters/index.html)

I believe that God wants us to be responsible citizens. The sixth commandment states that we should not kill. Most people would say that that particular command does not apply to them. But stop and think for a moment. When we recklessly mistreat God's Creation and, in effect, kill it off, are we breaking this commandment?

Take a moment to stop and think about the way you treat God's Creation. Are you a green terrorist or are you protecting the environment that God so lovingly took time to create for you?

Dear God,

I have so much to do and so little time to do it in that sometimes I get a little careless about your Creation. Issues like recycling can be boring and irritating, and I just don't see the point. Help me to understand that you created this world for me to enjoy and the only way that I can really enjoy it is by caring for it. Amen.

Unforgiven? Unforgivable?

'I sin so often, how can I know if I have committed the unforgivable sin?'

This question is, unfortunately, a common one among Christians, even long-time Christians. Many of us struggle with the sense that we may have indeed gone 'too far' for God to save us. We feel we've sinned just one too many times, and that now we most probably have been irrevocably lost, due to our lack of self-control or what have you. After all, God must have limits to his patience. Right? He couldn't possibly put up with this kind of garbage forever, could he?

As much as we might like to hypothesise about such things and 'hope for the best', what we really need is the bottom line from God's Word. So . . . that's what we're going to look at now.

The phrase 'the unforgivable sin' actually comes from a passage of Scripture found in both Mark 3 and Matthew 12:31-32. (We'll be focusing on Mark's passage, because the context is slightly more clear.)

Jesus had just finished appointing the Twelve (Mark 3:13-19), and then launched himself and his disciples into a full-blown day of ministry. That is where the issues began.

There was such a flood of need that came their way that they were overwhelmed and unable even to take a break to eat (v. 20b).

The family of

♦ Jerry Smith

Minister at Chelmsford and Basildon



Jesus heard about this selfless behaviour and thought that Jesus had 'slipped a cog', and so they were determined to stop him from such 'insanity' as helping everybody in sight (v. 21).

Meanwhile, Jesus' actions were beginning to undermine the authority of the religious regime. His actions were drawing people to himself and, of course, leading them away from the leaders and elite of the time. So they looked for ways to undercut or undermine his ministry, and settled upon the age-old strategy of slander. They accused him of being possessed by evil spirits and of casting out demons through the same (v. 22).¹

Of course, Jesus points out the absolute foolishness of this argument and how the logic of it is contradictory to the core (vv. 23-26).²

Then Jesus starts talking about 'all sins' being forgivable (even blasphemy), but then gives the exception to the rule: Whoever blasphemes [sins] against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' (vv. 28-29, NASB).³

Most of us would be forgiven for being slightly confused at this point, because what Jesus is saying seems to have little or no connection with what is going on. However, this is precisely where it is so important for us to pay attention to the context of the story, and by that I don't just mean read what has come before the passage, but also *read what comes after!* For immediately following (in v. 30), the Scripture says: 'because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit" ' (NASB).

In other words, Jesus was warning these religious leaders to 'watch themselves' because by their denials and false accusations of him they were actually working against the convicting power of the Holy Spirit! They were killing themselves spiritually (as Paul would say), '[searing] their own consciences' (1 Tim. 4:2, NASB), hardening their hearts against what they knew to be true! They knew that Jesus wasn't doing all the amazing stuff he was doing by the powers of darkness. They knew that his life and power were Heaven-sent. But Satan took advantage of their jealousy and pride and used them against Jesus and themselves! Because of this, Jesus warned them

before they let their hardening hearts go too far, before they closed their 'hearing' off entirely to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, thus committing the 'unpardonable sin'.

The unpardonable sin is not something like swearing too many times or lying to your parents or even getting drunk or stoned⁴ (as much as those things are sins and are damaging to our walk with Jesus).

The unpardonable sin is the sin, then, that we DON'T seek or want forgiveness for.

But some folks feel that because they just can't seem to 'get a handle' on their sinning, they are total failures as Christians and surely must have gone 'too far' for Jesus to forgive them.

The problem with this thinking is that it is not as if you can 'out-sin' the price that Jesus paid on the Cross. The price that Christ paid was, is and always will be enough to cover all sins that ever have or will be committed. His merciful heart is revealed in the statement: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9 KJV).⁵

Therefore, if God is willing to forgive us of any sin that we confess and look for cleansing from, the greatest danger to us is if we don't seek forgiveness, if we don't buy into the idea that we can be helped! Our greatest danger comes when we stop listening to the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit. Our hearts can indeed be hardened to the point where we can even stop hearing the voice of the Almighty speaking to our conscience (as the Pharisees were doing in this story). And that's just *scary!*

That's why it is absolutely imperative that we take God seriously when he speaks to our conscience, whether through a sermon, a Bible study, a magazine article, the advice of a friend or the promptings of the Holy Spirit. As long as we do this, we have nothing to fear of ever succumbing to the 'unpardonable sin'. It is only when we deny, reject and/or ignore the Holy Spirit's guidance that we place ourselves on dangerous ground and one step closer to committing this unbelievable mistake that would cost us everything, including eternal life.

May the good Lord himself keep us ever open to listening closely and obediently to his truth-telling, guiding Spirit.

NOTES

¹ The equivalent shock value in our day and age would be akin to accusing a minister of the Gospel of being a child molester or messing about with pornography.

² He also took the time to explain how he was actually doing what he was doing (v. 27).

³ Some might think: Oh . . . so it's OK to sin against God or Jesus, but you really gotta watch out about sinning against the Holy Spirit. . . . is that right?

Notice the implications: The argument can seem to imply that somehow the Holy Spirit is more important (or something) than the rest of the Trinity (which, of course, traditional Christian theology would disagree with). Contradicting this idea (of the Holy Spirit having pre-eminence amongst the Trinity), the Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit has accepted a serving role within the Godhead. Jesus himself said:

'I will send you the Counsellor – the Spirit of Truth. He will come to you from the Father and will tell you all about me. . . . I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convince the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment. . . . When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by revealing to you whatever he receives from me. (John 15:26; 16:7b-14, NLT.)

This, of course, is not meant to imply that the Holy Spirit is due any less honour and worship than the other members of the Trinity, only that it would be a false conclusion to think that the Holy Spirit is due more based on a misunderstanding of our passage being studied.

⁴ At least it is not those things alone.

⁵ The prophet Micah tells us that God 'pardons the sins of the survivors among his people. . . . [and] cannot stay angry with [his] people forever, because [he delights] in showing mercy. Once again [he] will have compassion on us. [He] will trample our sins under [his] feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!' (Mic. 7:18-19, NLT.)

Jerry Smith is the husband of one wife, and the father of 1.5 children. Born in the Rocky Mountains in Western Canada, he went to CUC (Canadian University College) for his undergraduate degree and Andrews University for his MDiv. He pastored in Eastern Canada until called to the UK in 2007 by the SEC. Jerry praises God for the many blessings in his life and desires with all his heart to give God all that he can.

ASI Youth for Jesus Nottingham 18 June to 12 July

• **Charlotte Bramble**



Evangelism. Boring? Unfulfilling? Graduates of ASI Youth for Jesus field school of evangelism would emphatically answer, 'No way!' Working with God, bringing others to him, is the most exciting and fulfilling experience to be had on Earth!

On 18 June, twenty-three enthusiastic youth from across England arrived in Nottingham for three weeks of evangelism training and experience.

The intensive schedule began on Monday; four classes each day (taught by Bible workers, evangelism school graduates and pastors), lunch, outreach in the afternoons and the evangelistic series in the evenings. During the outreach sessions the students conducted

some Bible studies and went from door to door, inviting people to the series and hoping to find those wistfully looking towards Heaven by means of a short community survey. One graduate, Manny Nelson said, 'The cliché that when doing door-to-door outreach doors are slammed in your face is not always true. During this programme I realised just how many people are out there, ready and just begging for



someone to share Christ with them.'

The evening evangelistic preacher was Adam Ramdin. Students played integral roles such as row hosts, special music, working on the radio team and greeting visitors. No fewer than 200 non-Adventist visitors came over the entire period, and during the series forty-six people requested baptism. Some have

since been baptised and more are still having studies. Our God is an awesome God!

Since graduation YFJ graduates have left with a renewed zeal to share Christ with this dying world. Some have begun Bible study groups in their churches and are also starting door-to-door projects. They are excited to see how God will continue to use them.

Look out for ASI Y4J UK 2010! Until then, let every day be a day of shining for Jesus Christ!

Charlotte is 20 years old and an ambassador for Jesus Christ. Presently she is about to embark on three years of study to become a Primary teacher. She loves her church family and is currently AY leader at Wellingborough Stanton Close SDA church. She enjoys being in nature and is amazed how, though tainted by sin, it still reveals God's inexplicably amazing character. She also loves singing, playing guitar and travelling!



One Cause, One Sound; L.I.V.E. • Katie Ramharacksingh

SEC Media reporter

From White Hall to Kennington Park, the crowd was out in full force ready to march. With banners, pickets and their voices, the mass of marchers drew Central London into the rally with a determined mind – one cause, one sound. The united voice called for the mindless atrocities to stop. Last year the L.I.V.E. March was filled with sadness after the loss of our key speaker, Pat Regan. This year we honoured her memory, along with other families who have lost loved ones through gun and knife crime. As the youth march progressed around London, both traffic and onlookers were brought to a stop, mesmerised by the energy and drive of those participating. The March ended at Kennington Park with a soulful programme including a drama production, by No Labels Academy, that demonstrated the effects of gun and knife crime. The crowd listened as family members told stories of how these crimes had affected them personally. This, combined with musical talent throughout the afternoon, reminded everyone present that after the violence continues to flare throughout the UK, God is the only hope we can still cling to. The community in the surrounding area was captivated by the performances and stories, allowing those involved to witness the impact they were making that very day.

The L.I.V.E. theme extended to the following weekend, where the SEC Youth Team established a Festival for all types of music and created a weekend that could appeal to many across the UK. The L.I.V.E. Festival kicked-off on the Friday with people arriving on site up until midnight! The weekend was located on the beautiful grounds of the Chantemarle Christian Centre in

Dorset: rolling hills, large grassy fields and a picturesque mansion were all part of the scene. Those spending the weekend were able to choose between accommodation or tents and by the number of tents that were pitched in the field it was difficult to say which choice was the more popular one! After everyone settled in on the Friday night and experienced a taste of the music to come, it wasn't long before Sabbath morning had arrived and more people were appearing on site. The morning service allowed everyone to get acquainted with the style of the weekend and a few performances were given in the hall. This was followed by several workshops, one in particular was held by Bobby Bovell talking about music inside and outside the Church, he asked the question: does God only like hearing us sing praises through hymns and switch off as soon as He hears a beat?

Sabbath ended with a display of many wonderful talents, between amazing performances by Four Kornerz and Sharon Rose, Joel Duntin, Philippa Hanna and the FOCUS band stunned the audience with their gifts. All the artists that performed over the weekend contributed to making the Festival an impacting one. As the weekend ended, one unanimous thought remained: we are all coming back next year for even more blessings!



Photos: Katie Ramharacksingh and Rachel Miller

• Mark Walmsley

Hi, it's me again, (Musical Mark). While I am definitely trying to leave my mark musically, I'm not too sure if I'm as successful at reducing my mark on the environment, but I have decided that I can at least do three things to help. I'm going to recycle whenever and however I can, I will not leave my stereo on standby, and I will eat organic vegetables (although I can't taste the difference between organic and genetically modified – my taste buds must have got used to the taste of pesticides!). As human beings, we also are part of the environment, so should ask ourselves whether we are polluting the lives of those around us or building them up. If you want to make a change, how about these three highly recommended songs to share with your friends? Now I don't believe in myths or legends but this issue we are recommending three legends (as in highly skilled and reasonably well-known) from within the urban music genre.



At no. 3 mixing, hip hop and rap Canadian artist Sho Baraka produced a fantastic record called 'Turn Up My Life'. He reminds me slightly of Kanye West and also wins the Generosity Award for putting sixteen songs on his album and giving away a free online album (go to www.reachrecords.com and scroll down to Free mixtape – Barakaology, then click Grab that mixtape right here.) It features him and some other artists. Check it out. Our song is 'Oh My Lord' which is all about calling on God, regardless of situations, and how God is always there even, when sometimes you don't expect him to be.

At no. 2, sounds of R&B and hip hop flow from Group 1 Crew. These guys mix it up with undertones of jazz and funk. It's as though diversity is their middle name (but metaphorically speaking). Their album is self titled and our stand out song is 'Love is a beautiful thing' which also wins the Lyrical Integrity Award hands down when they sing: 'Well, I've got to make it clear, Love's the reason we are here, We're the object of affection from a God who holds us dear, and everywhere we go and everything that we do, every time that we love, it's a reflection of you.' They also have a new album out entitled *Ordinary Dreamers* – it's awesome!



This issue's no.1 highly recommended song is from Deitrick Haddon, an artist who mixes soulful vocals with gospel and urban pop. The song is called 'Go with me' from his album *Revealed*. This is a very funky song all about stepping out in faith – just putting one step in front of another and getting out of those ruts of fear. He sings: 'There's a place we can go where everybody's loving each other, there's a lot of space, come and take your place, c'mon c'mon, you won't regret it, Go with me!' Well, I don't know about you, but I'm gonna take his advice and take my place in that heavenly environment and, as we go with him, may we build up people around us, loving them with God's love.

Next time's unobvious theme
– Christmas crackers

Other urban artists include:

- Four Kornerz
- 29th Chapter
- TobyMac
- Lisa McClenndon
- Mary Mary
- LZ7

Mark Walmsley is a youth teacher at his local church and hosts two Christian shows on local radio stations: Gravity FM and Boundary Sound. His shows Save Our Souls and The Upper Room are available at: www.gravityfm.net and www.boundarysound.co.uk



Adventist Volunteer Service

outgoing

Volunteer's name	Going from	Location	Volunteering at	Position	Returning
Elisa Alvarez	Cardiff	Spain	Colegio Timon	Primary English Teacher	Sept 2010
Abigail Dantzie	Lewisham	Korea	SDA Language School	English-Religion teacher	June 2010
Richard Harrison	Lewisham	Korea	SDA Language School	English-Religion teacher	July 2010
Joanna Jones	Clapton Community	Peru	Peruvian University	ESL teacher	Feb. 2010
Eunice Kiragu	Liverpool, Stoneycroft	Australia	It Is Written Evangelism College	Church planter/Bible worker	Nov. 2009
Melissa Nicholson	Tamworth	Honduras	Maranatha Bilingual School	Pre-school English teacher	June 2010
Sisa-Linda Nxumalo	Stratford	Korea	Korea SDA Language School	English-Religion Teacher	Dec 2010

incoming

Volunteer's name	Coming from	Location	Volunteering at	Position	Returning
Kim Barrett	Australia	Watford, SEC	Stanborough School	Assistant girls' dean	July 2010
Juan Darrichón	Argentina	Watford, SEC	Stanborough School	Chaplain/Youth worker	July 2010
Carlo Duran	Columbia	London	London Hispanic Church	Volunteer pastoral assistant	Feb 2010
Elian Giaccharini Sr	Argentina	Watford, SEC	Stanborough School	Assistant men's dean	July 2010
Reluta Paune	Romania	Watford, SEC	Stanborough School	Teaching assistant	July 2010
Misty Pearce	Australia	Cornwall	St Austell Project	Pastor/Youth/evangelist	April 2010
Audrey Reitsma	USA	Watford, SEC	Stanborough Park Church	Youth assistant	July 2010
Kyla Rocero	Philippines	Watford, SEC	Stanborough School	Library	July 2010

The following are all working in the NEC as pioneer task-force workers:

Volunteer's name	Coming from
Christopher Blake	Derby Chester Green
Winston Brown	Manchester South
Dana Connell	USA
Andre Crawford	Manchester Central
Madelon de Reus	Netherlands

Volunteer's name	Coming from
Indirah Job	Netherlands
Elaine & Robert Lillystone	Australia
Andrew Modelly	Bolton
Irvin Reid	Rochdale

For more information about volunteering visit www.adventistyouth.org.uk



Please remember these volunteers in your prayers.

Names correct at time of printing.



Plaistow Pathfinder & Adventurer club • Susan McLean Club director

For our club, getting involved initially meant making links with our local community participation units and for members to become part of our local active team so we can be part of the plans the council has for meeting residents' needs.

From a survey carried out in Newham, it was found that the top three concerns for Newham residents are:

1. Safety • Anti-crime, gun, knife and drugs events
2. Health • Healthy living/eating, anti-smoking
3. Environment • anti-litter, recycling, and so on

January – Cleves Primary School environmental emphasis event – helping children make litter bags with keepsake token saying: 'Keep God's World Clean'.

February – Manor Park Community Centre health emphasis event – helping the children to make craft items depicting '5-a-day fruits'. Also making pledge badges declaring that they will abstain from smoking and harmful drugs.

March – Lister Community School recycling emphasis event – visitors made gift bags from recycled paper or card. Some decorated them for their Mother's Day gift and also made Mother's Day cards. During the talent event two of our Adventurers volunteered to do a puppet presentation featuring the song 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. Afterwards a member of a Pentecostal Church took details as she wanted to invite the children to their church to do a presentation.

March – Play, Sow and Grow event with community links – painting murals with pictures of the four seasons, plus digging and planting vegetable seeds on community reclaimed project land.

June – Plaistow Park safety event – helping the children who attended to make sun visors from recycled paper as it was a hot day. Also giving out balloons with a message in each which read: 'I will lie down and sleep in peace for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.' Psalms 4:8/Zaboor 4:8. (The second reference would be more familiar to Muslims, as the community has a high Muslim population.) The Pathfinders also did a puppet skit in the afternoon about safety on the streets. Another events co-ordinator took details as she would like to include them in future youth talent programmes in the community.

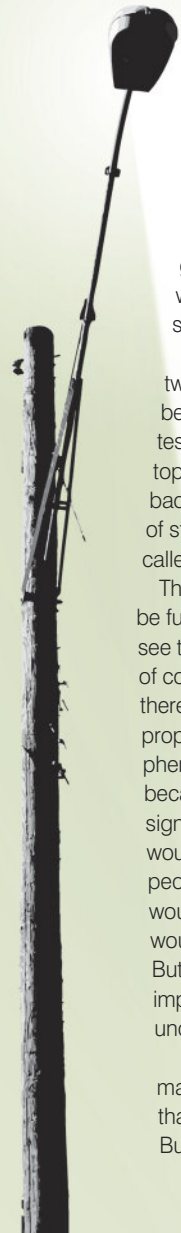
August – contacted by Newham 'Plant for Life Project' who wanted to know more about what Pathfinders do. The planting season will resume in September 2009 through to March 2010, and they would like to continue the project of planting 2,012 trees by 2012. As we had helped in 2008, they wanted to know if we were available to help out again this planting season. At the time of writing we were waiting to confirm mutually suitable dates.

We would like to thank God for the doors he is opening in the community for the Pathfinder ministries. To date, we have seventeen non-Adventist families who gave their contact details at community events we attended, who would like their children to become members of the Pathfinder club.



What can your Pathfinder club or Youth group do to get involved in your local community and meet your neighbours?

When darkness can be beautiful • Dr Mart de Groot



When God created Adam and Eve, he appointed them managers over the world. Managing the world well is in the first place in our own best interest. Much has been written about care for the environment, recycling, carbon footprints and so on. However, there is an easily forgotten wider environment that also needs our attention. Sun, moon, stars and galaxies also have a role to play in life on Earth. They were made, among other reasons, to provide us with signs. Jesus spoke about this, for example, in Luke 21:25. Today, modern technology is capable of giving us light twenty-four hours a day. As a result most stars have become invisible to today's city dwellers. You can take the test. Compare what you can see of the night sky from a hill top far away from artificial lights with the view from your back garden in the city. From the back garden the number of stars visible is greatly reduced. This phenomenon is called 'light pollution'.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, 'If there should be future signs in the sun, moon and stars, shall we able to see them?' The answer to this question is not a simple, 'Yes, of course.' For a moment think back to November 1833 when there was that spectacular star shower in fulfilment of such prophecies as Isaiah 34:4 and Revelation 6:13. A similar phenomenon today would not be 10% as impressive because of man-made light pollution. Thus, as a warning sign for people on Earth, another 1833-type star shower would miss the mark by a wide margin. With so many people living in cities, the majority of those living on Earth would remain oblivious to the sign. Of course, such an event would be captured on some cameras and be shown on TV. But those media are not able to reproduce faithfully the impact such a spectacle makes on an individual positioned under a clear dark sky.

Light pollution is very annoying for astronomers, too. It makes the study of deep space very difficult. You may think that this is tough on astronomers but does not affect you. But remember that we all have questions about the

universe. We want to know about the history and working of the universe and whether there may be other civilisations somewhere in space. Astronomers are the people who can at least begin to answer some of these questions.

So what can we do to reduce light pollution? When you install a light outside your house, make sure that any upward light is screened or reflected down to the ground. Thus, what needs to be seen will become better visible, and fewer lights are required for the same amount of illumination. This will make a good contribution to reducing energy waste. More detailed plans and ideas can be obtained from the International Dark Sky Association (IDA: www.darksky.org).

'Darkness is as essential to our biological welfare, to our internal clockwork, as light itself' (Verlyn Klinkenborg, in 'Our Vanishing Night', *National Geographic Magazine*, November 2008). The American Medical Association, for example, is supporting the IDA to reduce wasteful use of energy, greenhouse gases, and glare that affects road safety.

Let us all do our part to preserve this beautiful part of Creation that 'declares the glory of God' (Psalm 19:1).

Dr de Groot hails from The Netherlands where he studied astronomy. He has worked at the European Southern Observatory in Chile and from 1976-2000 at the Armagh Observatory in Northern Ireland, most of that time as its director. He is now the pastor of the Coleraine church in the Irish Mission. Do you have any questions for Dr de Groot? Email them to mart.degroot@gmail.com





Here's what I do . . .

Hi, my name is Anna Surridge and I'd like to tell you what I'm doing about climate change.

Near the end of last year, I heard that the Welsh Assembly Government was holding a competition to find six 'Climate Change Champions' from within Wales. The same had been done the previous year, and the six winners had been working throughout 2008 to spread the word of climate change and get people to reduce their carbon footprint. The environment has always been an interest of mine, and I thought I would give it a go, even though I didn't think I stood a chance. I apprehensively filled out the form, along with my entry video, and I thought that would be the last I ever heard about it. Oh, how wrong I was!

Skip forward a couple of months to Monday 19 January and you would have seen me at the site of the official launch of the 2009 Climate Change Champions, feeling a little as though the previous day of media training had actually saved my life. I found myself being interviewed on climate change for BBC news and I

• Anna Surridge

Climate Change Champion for Wales

have to admit that, although I was absolutely relishing being in the limelight, it was a bit on scary side!

And you could say that it was the first day of the rest of my life (well, of this year at least). I have now been a Climate Change Champion for six months and I'm loving every minute of it! So far, I would say one of my biggest learning curves would have been the fact finding trip to Brussels. We travelled on the Eurostar (much more eco-friendly than flying) and visited things like the 'It's our earth' expo at the Tour and Taxis, and a biomass plant under construction. We also had a 'dragon's dialogue' at the Welsh Assembly offices in Brussels where we talked to people ranging from the head of BP in Europe to a representative of Friends of the Earth youth. Not only did I learn a lot, but I also became good friends with the other champions.

Throughout the year so far, I have been doing a lot of varied things like writing articles, being interviewed, going on photo shoots, speaking at events, but I have also been making changes in my life, too (and bugging my family and friends to do so as



Anna is 16 years old and currently living in Cardiff. She is really into art and also loves photography and writing, and likes doing a bit of music on the side.



well!). Just for example, I used to love long showers, but I now have a timer so I don't waste water! And I never leave my phone charging all night now either. I went to my prom recently and instead of getting a limo I went on the train to make a stand for public transport, and got a vintage dress to be more eco-friendly. I think my friends think I'm a little crazy, but at least they have noticed!

I have learnt so much this year and I can't believe I'm already half-way through my year 'in office', so to speak. Last weekend we met up again in St David's for a sixth-month review of what we have all been doing. Sadly, two of the champions couldn't make it, but we had a fantastic time all the same. We reviewed what had gone well this year, what hasn't gone to plan among other things and, most importantly, what we are planning to do. We each have a budget which we can use to do a big project to make a real difference. Last year, the champions combined their money and

released a single called 'Carbon Soldier'. For my project I would really like to write and illustrate a children's fictional book about climate change and get it published. I think it would be a great way to get the message of climate change out to the younger people here in Wales. One person we met who was really inspirational (and also a bit radical) was Andy Middleton, founder of TYF (an eco-friendly adventure company based in Wales). He talked to us for about an hour, but I honestly could have listened all day! He certainly gave us a lot of things to think about.

And I really have changed a lot through the last sixth months. The more I learn about climate change, the more passionate I feel about getting out there and doing something, and the more I realise that we all have to do something now, before it's too late.

To find out more about what Anna has been up to in the last year, check out her website at: www.anna.surridge.org.uk.



Five ways to enjoy the outdoors more

(it really isn't that scary)

By now, summer is remembered only by the digital photos we don't print anymore, and the view from our window may be wet and autumnal, but it is still a great time to get outdoors and enjoy the surroundings.

Whether you live in the city or country, there are plenty of ways of spending time with others or alone, appreciating the beauty God has given. In fact, this is arguably one of the best times of the year to get outdoors; no more hay fever, the heat of the day is more manageable, and once-crowded recreational areas are now sparsely populated.

So here are just five ways to enjoy the outdoors in the autumn. As you spend time outside, remember that God invited Adam and Eve to explore the garden and see what he had made for them. God is waiting to be discovered in the outdoors.

Enjoy yourself by doing an Adventurer award or Pathfinder honour.

Adventurers and Pathfinders should not spend the majority of their club time stuck away in the back room of a church, nor should these activities be limited to club time. With hundreds of awards and honours available, parents have a great opportunity to invest time and create memories with their children by doing some of these activities.

I know what it is like as a parent to find things to do with kids. And I can remember what it was like as a child wanting to do things with my parents. So here is the deal: speak to your club director (if you have a club in your church), and clear it with them that you will not be doubling up on activities they are planning to run in club. Then crack on with doing something as a family, or even by yourself.

Some badges take hours to work on, but others can be done on a Sunday morning. For those early Friday evenings coming up, why not try the Bats honour and take a dusk walk to go bat spotting.

A full list of requirements can be found at gcyouthministries.org and additional unofficial helps can be found at

en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Adventist_Youth_Honors_Answer_Book

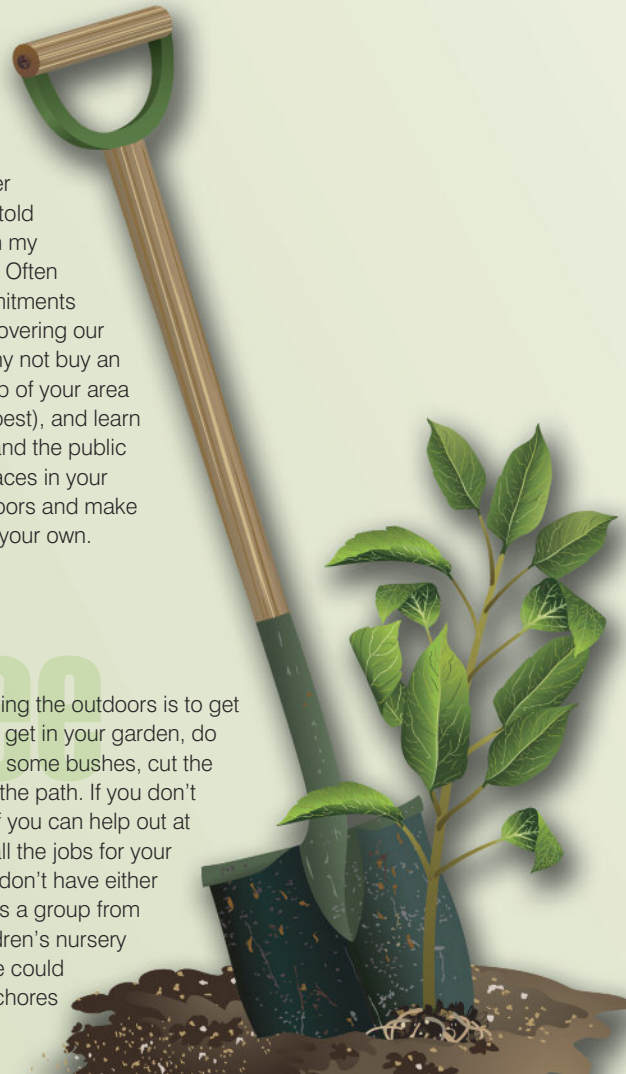
Go and do something constructive, and get a badge for it on the way. For more information, contact your church club leader or Mission/Conference Youth department.

Buy a map of your area.

So many times I have met people, sometimes from other countries, who have told me of great places in my own neighbourhood. Often time and other commitments prevent us from discovering our surroundings, but why not buy an Ordnance Survey map of your area (1:25 000 would be best), and learn about map reading and the public places and open spaces in your area? Then get outdoors and make some discoveries of your own.

Get your hands dirty.

Another way of enjoying the outdoors is to get dirty. What I mean is, get in your garden, do some digging, prune some bushes, cut the grass, or just sweep the path. If you don't have a garden, see if you can help out at church; don't leave all the jobs for your deacons! And if you don't have either of these, try asking as a group from church if a local children's nursery or old people's home could do with your help in chores outside.



Geocaching.

Combining walking with hide-and-seek and technology, this game has been around for about five years.

Soon after the US government made their network of satellite transmitters available to every earthling, someone sitting at home wondered what would happen if he posted some co-ordinates online. Would anyone come and find the thing they had hidden? To his amazement, people did.

Using basic technology, a satellite global positioning system (gps), it is possible to locate a position anywhere on Earth. Accuracy varies according to the receiver, buildings, tree cover, weather conditions and so forth, but even a basic hand-held device can get you within five metres of a given location. This same technology is used in car sat navs today, with the added software of maps. The device works out its own location and finds the best route for you to get to your destination.

The long story short (you need to know the long story for the Pathfinder Geocaching honour), there are now thousands of people who have hidden something, normally a goodie-filled sandwich-box-size plastic container, all over the world. These boxes are called caches. You may know this term from computer language. It is a military term, too, meaning a place where things are stored, from the French 'to hide'.

These people and others find the co-ordinates of caches and go out to find them. Some do multiple caches in one day, and some caches are placed in order to do a circular walk.

To find out more about this activity go to www.geocaching.com and, armed with a gps receiver, you can have some fun finding hidden locations, many of which may be just down the road from you.

Using this activity you can get out and take a friend for a walk and have some hide-and-seek fun in the bargain. It's a great way to disguise a walk as a game.



• Nathan Stickland

Pastor Stickland is an Associate Youth Director in the South England Conference responsible for the Junior age group, Pathfinders and Adventurers. His love of the outdoors has led him to pursue a degree in Outdoor Education.

Get involved with a local conservation group.

Volunteerism is a great pastime, especially if you can see some immediate results. Try going down to your local library to find which wildlife, conservation or environmental groups meet near you. You could get involved in anything from recording wildlife to cleaning out ponds and rivers. This kind of activity keeps you active, helps nature, and looks good on your job application!

Some of the most beneficial things you will find in any of these five activities include exercise, developing friendships, learning about nature, a chance to meet new people and witness to them, and meeting God through the things he has made for us to enjoy.

So what are you waiting for? Put this magazine down and get your outdoor clothes on. Grab a friend and get outside. God is waiting to meet with you.



Who is my neighbour?

On the plane out of Nairobi, on the eve of the US presidential election, there was no mistaking who Kenyans were rooting for. People were sporting Obama T-shirts and touting US flags. I caught the excitement, while travelling back from a renewable energy fair in Somaliland, supported by ADRA-UK and the European Commission.

Last month, President Obama made his first trip in office to Africa. With relatives living in Africa, he has a unique vantage point. But people are again asking, 'Why is Africa still in a mess after all this development aid?'

Arriving in Africa for the first time can blow your mind. Kids with no shoes. Mile upon mile of shanty towns. The first experience of a pit latrine, at night, without a torch. Yet the long-term resident in Africa knows that some things are improving. Roads are being paved. Mobile phones are spreading even into the countryside. More children are completing primary school than before.

We say 'Africa', but there are many 'Africas', and together they are vast. In such a huge place, aid budgets are small change. People expect Africa to be crowded with development agencies. But at village level, this is not the case. Africans working in Europe send more money home than official development aid.

What we see on television is often the extremes. Not all of Africa is burning. Not all Africans are starving. Nor is Africa one giant wildlife park. Yes, there are conflicts, as in Darfur or Somalia, awful, politically motivated conflicts stemming from ethnic division or stoked by religious extremism. But they are not everywhere or all the time.

There are common challenges, however. African societies below the Sahara desert are overwhelmingly agricultural and rural. Most people grow their own food. When rains come late and harvests are poor, granaries (see picture) are less full, and people are



forced to sell livestock, contract debts or eat less. In the countryside, women often have five children or more. The population is growing, and much of the population is under 15. So pressure on resources (land, water, jobs) is growing. Money is tight for most, almost non-existent for many. Infrastructure is thin on the ground (roads, electricity, health centres, schools). Mobility is limited. When you leave the cities, the traffic thins out. People don't commute. They migrate. Water and sanitation are poor. Even in the cities, many houses don't have taps. In the countryside, you are lucky to find a single toilet in some villages. Life expectancy, though growing, is still twenty

years less than elsewhere. It is not just kids under 5 who die. Young people in their prime are cut down by malaria, meningitis, or traffic accidents, especially in towns. HIV/AIDs has scythed through populations in Southern and East Africa. Modern medicines cost too much, and people often seek medical help too late. Traditional beliefs shape how people interpret the world and the passage of life and death.

In this context, do I have a responsibility? Jesus answered the question 'Who is my neighbour?' with the parable of the Good Samaritan. But who is my neighbour in the twenty-first century? The family across the street? The orphan in Ouagadougou? The former child soldier in Congo? In today's global village, what would Jesus have said?

Somalia – Energy and Livelihood Project

ADRA-UK has been supporting the Somalia Energy and Livelihood Project since November 2007. SELP is implemented by ADRA Somalia in Puntland and Somaliland. It is also funded by the European Commission. It aims to increase awareness and use of alternative energy options in productive sectors, water supply, education, health, irrigation and at household level. The project is introducing solar energy in rural schools and health clinics, and promoting wind power for energy production and water pumping. It also works with local craftsmen and women to produce and distribute energy efficient cook stoves, reducing pressure on threatened woodland resources.

See www.adrauk.org for more info and to find out how you can help.

• **James Shepley**
Programmes Officer, ADRA-UK

Plastic oceans

Our knowledge of this world, its organisms and their daily fight for survival is increasing at an accelerated pace. Yet it seems we are just as quickly destroying our world and accelerating its demise. We, in common with all organisms produce waste, a by-product of life itself but, unlike the other residents of this planet, our waste is artificial and hence deadly.

It was once thought that the ocean's capacity to absorb waste was infinite, but no sooner have we realised the detrimental effect our waste has on this planet, than we are seeing the effects not only on the marine environment but on us humans as well (Nybakken, 1997) One problem is plastics, it has been estimated that 90% of all waste found in the world's oceans are plastics and that every square mile of the world's oceans contains 46,000 pieces of plastic (Marks & Howden, 2008).

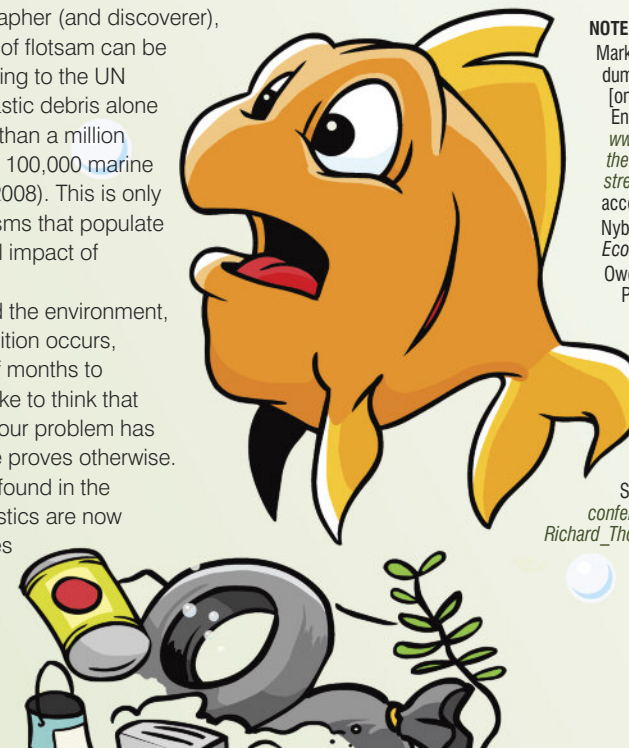
Recently in the Pacific Ocean, what scientists describe as a 'plastic soup', twice the size of America, was found. Charles Moore, an American oceanographer (and discoverer), estimates that 100 million tons of flotsam can be found circulating there. According to the UN Environmental Programme, plastic debris alone has caused the death of more than a million seabirds yearly, and more than 100,000 marine mammals (Marks & Howden, 2008). This is only a fraction of the marine organisms that populate the world's oceans, so the total impact of plastics is still unknown.

Once plastics have entered the environment, the slow process of decomposition occurs, which can take just a couple of months to hundreds of years. We would like to think that once they start to decompose our problem has been solved, but new evidence proves otherwise. Microscopic bits of plastic are found in the sediments of our beaches. Plastics are now becoming a part of our beaches and are floating unnoticed in the oceans. This microscopic plastic debris can be smaller than the width of your hair, but the

problems that can ensue can be catastrophic. (Owen, 2004.) Plastics have only been produced in the last forty years, so the full extent of this problem has yet to be discovered. Some research has suggested that plastics can absorb, release and transport chemical pollutants, which can potentially move from the plastics to the food chain, which we are inevitably apart of. (Thompson & Olsen Y, *et al.*, 2004.)

God created this world and instructed us in Genesis 1:28 'God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." '

It is our duty as Christians to take care of this world. Just as we are to keep the Sabbath law, so we must also take care of this earth. What can *you* do to reduce your use of harmful plastics?



NOTES

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Danielle is 20 years old and lives on the island of Grenada. She's just graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Life Sciences, specialising in marine biology, and loves spending time with friends, hiking and swimming at the beach.

Eco health – How green are you? • Sharon Platt-McDonald

BUC Health Ministries director



Environmental issues have been topical in the news recently and have been high on many people's concerns for some time.

I recently attended a Global Health and Lifestyle Conference in Geneva and was fascinated by one of the presentations on twenty-first-century living and what it is doing to our planet. The presenter Per de Lange (Health Ministries director for Norway) highlighted the problems and solutions of key environmental issues such as global warming, toxic waste, air, water and soil pollution and occupational safety. He identified the physical, psychological, environmental, economic and social cost on a global scale of ignoring our current ecological challenges. Per also reminded us of our spiritual accountability to be good stewards of what the Lord has entrusted to us, including how we care for our world and the things that harm it.

So what can you do as teens and young adults to assist with environmental health? Have you considered 'going green'? Why not try the following suggestions?

Action points

Ideas to begin your green journey

- Get involved in the green issues that affect your family, your community and your planet. Think of the physical, emotional, social, economic and environmental benefits this can achieve. Many teens are currently involved in recycling projects, park clean-ups, domestic items swap events, letter writing to local papers and MPs highlighting the importance of a particular environmental issue.

- If your school, college or university uses chemical cleaners to clean and disinfect classrooms, ask them to switch to eco-friendly cleaners that are better for the environment and non-toxic for students and staff.
- Many organisations and community action groups are now granting awards and funding for eco-friendly projects. Why not think of ways to make your school, college or university more ecologically safe? For example, you could talk to your teacher or school head about starting a class tree-planting project. The trees can help reduce the school's energy costs and provide a more appealing place for students to relax. Additionally some schools are now developing herb and vegetable gardens where they sell the produce to the local greengrocers. This is a very exciting initiative as it encourages creativity, and the therapeutic benefits of watching things grow are well documented for our well-being.
- At the end of the school year, instead of throwing out your old books, art and sports equipment, organise a swap event where students can drop off what they don't want or need and pick up things they want.
- Another activity at the end of the school year could be to use any leftover materials and donate them to needy causes like charities or organisations such as homeless shelters, hospitals, children's homes, or event libraries and museums.

Tips for everyday eco awareness:

- To reduce clutter in your home you could sell or donate your extra school supplies, equipment and books.
- Eat less meat. It takes more energy, water, chemicals and grain to make a meat burger than a veggie burger.
- Junk junk food. Most fast foods, takeaways and ready meals have excess packaging and high carbon footprint. Avoid them. Get cooking with simple menus from inspirational cookbooks!
- Cut down on plastic bags. Reduce plastic waste and stock up on reusable bags. Visit www.plasticbagfree.com for more information.
- Check your appliances. Be energy efficient. Before buying another appliance, check out suitable alternatives. Try advice from websites such as www.coolproducts.eu or www.which.co.uk
- Monitor electricity use. For green energy visit www.greenelectricity.org
- Reduce heating bills and energy use. Turn down the thermostat. Try www.eco-boiler.com
- If you're into mechanical things you can learn how to recharge, repair, recycle or reduce battery use by visiting: www.recyclethis.co.uk
- Walk more. Don't use a car for short journeys.

Let me know if you implement any of the above and how you get on. I'd love to hear from you.

Good health!

It's your turn

If you think that Adventist youth are in short supply in your local church, you really needed to be at the Pan-European Youth Congress in Munich, Germany, at the beginning of August. There were thousands of Adventist youth there. From Russia, Spain, Austria, Holland, Germany, Israel, Portugal, Croatia, Serbia. You name it. Most countries in Europe, and a few surrounding ones, were represented at this congress.

The United Kingdom was well-represented throughout the congress. Joel Holford proudly carried the Union Jack in the opening flag ceremony. Andrew Davis, trainee pastor (and comedian) was one of the moderators for the event and opened the conference in true Adventist British style. Eddie Hypolite, one of the SEC associate Youth directors (Teens), spoke on several occasions. Eddie was the speaker on the first evening when he addressed the subject of 'hearing' the Word of God and then 'declaring it'. He also had the privilege of giving several workshops, being on a panel and delivering the Sabbath afternoon sermon on committing to Jesus Christ.

There was a lot of music at the congress. Each evening at least one country was represented. From ballet and the holy performance of Richard Smallwood's 'I Love the Lord' on Sabbath morning to the operatic tones of 'The Holy City', there was a great deal of variety. Each weekday evening, after the commitment service, a group of young people from London provided 'the afterglow', an hour of informal praise and worship.



• Catherine Anthony Boldeau

But the standing ovation of the congress was given to Austin Blackburn from St Austell Church in Cornwall when he turned his saw into an instrument of beauty as he played Simon and Garfunkel's 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'. It was 'the business'. One person from the UK, surprisingly said, 'Austin's performance made me proud to be British.'

When asked about her thoughts on the congress, Hasina-Jade Pusey from the Chiswick church, said, 'I loved it! It was amazing to be with young people from all around the world. For me, it was a great spiritual experience.'

The purpose of the congress was to invite the youth of the Church to begin to take a more active part in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The theme, 'It's Your Turn', was chosen to encourage young people to get more involved, not only on a spiritual level but as contemporary missionaries.

Every service and presentation was centred around this, including Friday night's sermon by Baraka Muganda, Youth director from the Seventh-day Adventist Headquarters in Washington. 'Tell Your Story' was his message. 'It's your turn to tell others about Jesus, just like Peter and John, just like the disciples did after they received the Holy Spirit. It's your turn to get up and make a difference,' was his conclusion. Following his sermon, there was a baptism of 18 young people from around Europe.

One of the outcomes of the congress was an initiative called *The Munich Statement*, stating the youth's commitment to the Church and their desire to be more involved in the mission of the Church, in the administration of the Church and in tackling social issues. Commenting on the statement, Paul Tompkins, one of the European Youth directors, said, 'The church welcomes an ongoing dialogue and partnership with its youth.'

Reflecting on the Congress, Des Boldeau, Youth director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United Kingdom, said, 'It was a wonderful spiritual event. I only wish more young people from the UK could have been there.'

Visit www.aycongress.org for the full picture gallery.

Courage to stand – International Pathfinder Camporee

Day 1 – Monday 10 August

On 10 August 2009 a group from Stanborough Park Pathfinder club left the UK for a Camporee in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, USA. Some of the Pathfinders were excited because it was their first time in America. We had to get to the airport by 9.30 but there was an accident on the M25 and the helicopter was on the motorway, so because of the traffic most of us got there after 10 but we still got to check in when we got there and caught our flight that was for 12.15. Finally we got to take off at nearly 1 o'clock, and everyone was happy.

After our nine-hour flight we arrived at O'Hare airport, and when the pilot landed the plane everybody clapped. Finally we were in America: now we had to go through immigration and customs. A few people had their fingerprints checked and eyes photographed but most people didn't. We then had to go on a coach to Oshkosh that took nearly three hours to get there. Nearly everyone slept on the coach.

When we got to Oshkosh there were a lot of other Pathfinder groups there – some were English, most were American and some were from other countries. It was dark when we arrived and we went to bed in the big tent.

Day 2 – Tuesday 11 August

Today was the day Camporee started; everyone had to help to put up seven big tents to sleep in. There were two boys' tents and five girls' tents. After putting up the tents we had to put out our sleeping bags. In our tent there was our leader and Pathfinders from Stanborough and people from Holloway, Milton Keynes and Bethel. The reason why the smaller tents weren't there was because the lorry transporting them was sent back because it was too heavy.



Last night it felt as though there were 1,000 people sleeping in one tent. After the tents were put up a few people from the Stanborough club went to Walmart/ADSA to shop. Some Pathfinders bought food; others bought objects like rugby balls and pillows. At 5pm everyone from the SEC went to the opening ceremony in dress uniform but nearly everyone else was dressed casually.

At the opening ceremony we were told what we were going to be doing during the week and we first met Toby the puppet and had the first act of the drama production called 'Esther: Courage to stand'. We all got back to our tents at 9.45pm and were supposed to go to bed but pushed the boundaries and talked until well past the 11pm curfew!

Day 3 – Wednesday 12 August

Today was the second day where you could do activities and honours. There were over 100 honours to choose from. One person I know completed thirteen honours during the Camporee and our leader managed to complete only one. I completed five honours. Most of us completed camping skills 1-4; others completed worms, stars, scrap-booking, butterflies and moths. We were also able to see puppet shows, BMX biking demonstrations and drilling and marching displays. There were also climbing walls, bouncy castles and lots of food stalls. We could also go off the campsite and some people went to Walmart/ADSA again. Some of the boys in our camp had a water fight after they got back from Walmart. At 6.30pm we went to worship, and the drama of Esther continued. Before the drama we also had 'Toby time' with Toby the puppet. At 9.45pm worship finished, and we went back to our tents in the



dark. We had to be in bed by 11 o'clock but we were talking and having fun well past that time.

Day 4 – Thursday 13 August

Today was the same as yesterday with activities and honours. In the morning we watched some more drilling and marching displays and did activities at the campsite. In the afternoon everyone in our club went to the beach – it was a lake with a sandy area and grass area plus play areas, showers, changing rooms and café. The great thing about swimming in the lake was that the water was quite warm and it was not salty. We got back in time for dinner at 4 o'clock as at 5 we needed to go up to the stage area early for worship, because we were going to be at the front with the Ohio Conference Pathfinders who were our hosts. When we were waiting for worship some big balls were thrown into our area and everyone played with them.

Every time the balls came to us we knocked them back. The meeting was very long because the worship did not start until 7.30pm but we had to stay in our seats at the front because there were so many people – over 35,000. After worship we went back to our tents and went to bed.

Day 5 – Friday 14 August

Today at 8am we went to the YMCA. Most of the Pathfinders from our group went ice-skating and then swimming, while others played basketball and football. After the swimming some went kayaking and others stayed at the YMCA and played football and basketball. When we got back we had dinner and then went to the evening programme and the drama of Esther continued. We also had lots of singing and 'Toby time'. We then went back to our campsite and went to bed.



Photos: Nathan Stickland

Diary by Joshua Russell

Stanborough Park Church Pathfinder club member



Day 6 – Sabbath 15 August

Today was the Sabbath day so we went to worship in the morning. Nearly everyone at worship was in dress uniform and it was great to be one of the Pathfinders. The speaker was Pastor James Black from the North American Division. There was an announcement about baptisms being held in the afternoon and over 550 people were baptised! Later, we marched in the International Parade which lasted for nearly two hours in the hot sun. When we got back we

had to change and get ready for the evening worship and pack up our bags so we could go to the hotel the next day for the SEC heritage tour. At 7.30pm we attended worship for the last 'Toby time' and the end of the Esther drama. After everything ended there was a massive firework display that went on for ages with some amazing fireworks. For the last night we all had to go into the marquee and sleep there because the tents were being taken down during the night by some of the leaders.

Day 7 – Sunday 16 August

This was the last day and after we got up and had breakfast and finished our packing we helped to take down the remaining tents and load the lorry. It was great fun going up and down on the tailgate with the heavy equipment. At about 9.30 the coach came and picked us up from the place where we were camping, which meant we did not have to carry our bags across the campsite to the main gate which would have been about a half-mile walk.

In summary:

Camping in Oshkosh was not very different from camping at home with the SEC, as many of the faces in my tent were familiar. Despite the very long queues for breakfast and the even poorer camp shower conditions, I was not in a rush to return home; it was all very refreshing. I will continue to enjoy being a member of the Stanborough Park Pathfinder club, even though marching is probably my least favourite activity!

Missions of mercy

When I was younger, the idea of my becoming a missionary was just the worst thing in the world. There was no way you could ever get me to travel around the world, Bible under arm, telling people about Jesus. No way! What would that do to my street cred? But then, as I got older and started reading my Bible and talking to God more, I began to relate more to characters in the Bible and soon found my favourites, my heroes – Paul and Moses – ordinary men who became extraordinary by standing for the Lord against so many hardships and still prevailed. The idea of becoming a missionary didn't seem so bad anymore. . . . Paul of Tarsus . . . Moses, Prince of Egypt. . . . Sandy of Hounslow . . . I'd be proud to be like them!

A friend of mine had been watching a TV programme one evening about a Christian medical charity organisation called Mercy Ships and knew immediately that I'd be interested (this is how far I had come in my desire to travel and speak up for God!). When I looked up their website, I was hooked. However, I didn't go off straightaway – a new job came up and I took that instead, I think partly out of fear of the unknown. I'd been for job interviews before and they were a breeze compared to going off to some unknown (to me, at least) part of the world and actually living there!

» Sandy Officer



So God saw fit to give me a break for a few years but then started tapping me on the shoulder to get my attention just a couple of years ago. I couldn't ignore him any longer. It was time to go to Africa. I sound more like Jonah than Paul or Moses!

There are some dangers involved in being a missionary, especially so far away in certain countries – the threat of war, pirates, voodoo, just to name a few. In fact, it was very sad but while I was on the ship in Benin, we heard of a lady from the Peace Corps base not too far from the ship who had been murdered and, judging from the remains of her body, had been used in a voodoo sacrifice. But through our faith and trust in God, we didn't allow these incidents to affect us too much. The devil played a big part in trying to scare us all but our faith in God was stronger. Yes, these things happen and could even happen to us but, for God, it was worth the risk.

Mercy Ships is dedicated to bringing hope and healing to the world's poorest. It is dedicated to serving the African people in the way Jesus would. Everything revolves around the life of Christ and us following in his footsteps, and when I joined the ship I found this to be so true. That's not to say everyone is perfect on the ship – far from it. But what was evident from the moment I stepped on board

was that *everyone* on the ship was of like mind – here to serve the Lord in whatever capacity they could. It was literally all hands on deck in making sure this ship, the *Africa Mercy*, served in the way it was designed for.

Just to give you an idea of the process involved in helping the sick people, this is how it worked. When the ship entered a new country, it would set up what was called Screening Day, and this would sometimes be extended to two or three days, depending on the number of people wanting to be seen. The doctors and mental health teams would examine each and every person waiting to evaluate whether the ship was able to help them or not. If you were able to be helped, you received an appointment card. However, if your infirmities were beyond the ship's resources, you were prayed with (if you so chose) and helped in trying to find alternatives, if any. It was heartbreaking at times when you saw the small groups praying, knowing that it meant it was beyond our means to help them. You can imagine how long the queues were when you consider the fact that either there were no medical facilities in the country for these people or what little there was would be way too expensive for these people to afford. And so the ship was seen as a blessing for them insofar as, as long as the ship was in a position to help them, they would receive medical treatment for free. This also gave the crew the opportunity to talk of God's love for them without being pushy, sometimes demonstrating God's love just in the care and love they showed these people. Having wards on board the ship made it that much easier for many of us non-medical crew to visit with the patients and just talk and play with

them, many of them being young children.

What I particularly loved about serving on the *Africa Mercy* is that not only does it bring hope and healing to others, it also benefits you and the other missionaries on board in ways you couldn't even begin to imagine. The impact of being a missionary for me was immense. I never expected it to hit me so hard. I have certainly drawn closer to God and have a thirst for the Bible and prayer more than I have ever had in my life. Anyone can be a missionary, wherever and whoever you are. God just happened to send me to Liberia and Benin with Mercy Ships. The ship is just one way, and God in his wisdom knew me and what I needed in order to do his will. Who knows where he'll send you? Either way, you can guarantee he's got your back and you'll never be the same again.

And so my teenage foolish idea of what it meant to be a missionary and all it entailed was *totally* off key! The rewards are just overflowing, not only for those across the seas in need, but also for those God has hand-picked to do his will. I have no doubt in my mind about that – I'm living proof. I can't even begin to tell you of the way it makes you feel, knowing what you're doing is all for the good, and all to the glory of God. There is nothing I'd rather do. The Bible text that always keeps me on track is one I have engraved on my heart and in my mind, voiced by my old hero, Paul: 'I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.' And I for one can't wait to hear God say to me on that day, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. . . .'



Sandy is a Production Controller for a publishing company. Whilst she enjoys her work, she has a heart for missions and sees herself travelling the world, helping those in need and spreading God's love. In between, she'll just continue to produce books.



Photo competition!

Great news – we've extended the deadline for the **encounter Photo competition until Monday 19 October 2009.**

This means that you have another few weeks to get out and about snapping some photos of UK and Ireland wildlife and landscapes or your own 'green' projects. The category details are outlined on the right. You don't have to be a photography pro to enter – all types of good quality photos are acceptable, including any spur of the moment ones you might take from a mobile phone!

Prizes will be awarded to the photo judged to be the best in each category and there will be a grand prize for the overall winner.

This is an excellent chance to send in your photos and they will all be displayed on our website. Any that are shortlisted will also be printed in the December edition of **encounter**.

Category prizes include one of Yann Arthus-Bertrand's stunning book *The Earth from the Air – 365 New Days*, BBC book *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* and also *Landscape Photographer of the Year*. The overall winner will receive a Joby Gorillapod – a fantastic must-have mini tripod for every type of photographer. It doesn't even need a stable base to stand, very useful when out walking, and you can attach it with its flexible leg-grips to anything including lamp posts and stair banisters!

Send your entries and your name, age and contact details to encounter@adventist.org.uk

Categories:

- **Preserving our environment** – photos of the way you and your friends or youth group are working to preserve and improve your local environment.
- **UK and Ireland wildlife** – photos of native animals, birds, plants and creatures in their natural habitats. Domestic animals and pets are not included in this category.
- **Earth, sea and sky** – showcasing your best landscape photographs of the UK and Ireland.

Go to: www.adventistyouth.org.uk for all entry details and full terms and conditions.

